

Keeping Long Island green and clean



Charles Vigliotti grew a business by helping to preserve Long Island's environment.

By ADINA GENN

Charles Vigliotti is proud of Long Island Compost, a \$30 million company he built with his brothers, Dominic and Arnold. But he's just as pleased with the company's help in preserving Long Island's environment.

Headquartered in Westbury, Long Island Compost collects organic materials, including leaves, brush and grass clippings. It then processes this material on site, converting it into compost, and packages it. The compost is marketed to and sold in garden centers across the region.

The company's vertical operation

thrives in an era where some question the economics of recycling (think Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg's nearly two-year suspension of glass and plastic recycling that ended in 2004.)

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But by focusing on compost, an emerging trend that Vigliotti noticed in the late 1980s, the brothers, who had opened a trash-hauling business in 1976, fulfill the recurring need to collect organic materials, keeping

them out of landfills.

"We began to see more and more landscaping debris in our facilities," Vigliotti recalled. Traveling nationwide to study the industry, he saw an

opportunity to turn this material into a commodity. "By 1991, we were in the composting business," he said.

Since then the company has pushed forward, meeting the needs of landscapers, farmers, school districts,

municipalities and run-of-the-mill gardeners.

Today, the company has two locations, the 3-acre Westbury site, and a 62-acre facility in Yaphank, opened in 2000. Each location features a site for landscapers to drop off organic materials, which the company later harvests into compost. Landscapers also can purchase more than 13,000 items, including spreaders, mowers and grass seed.

To lure in customers in its first year, the brothers sought out landscapers. "We drove around personally. We'd see a landscaper, we'd stop him while he was cutting grass," and hand him a flyer about the company, Vigliotti said.

They continued conversations with landscapers as they dropped off debris. Landscapers left saying they needed to shop for supplies. Vigliotti saw their empty trucks, and realized a new income stream by selling landscaper supplies at Long Island Compost.

The brothers, who now count municipalities, school districts and golf courses as clients, continue reaching out to prospects by joining local school and golf course associations.

In 1999, the company discovered a way to sign up "big industrial operations" for its services. After receiving strong support from the Long Island Farm Bureau and Cornell Cooperative Extension, the company began partnering with farmers who receive payment and free compost in exchange for the use of an acre of land for onsite

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composting. It currently works with 40 farms, traveling from site to site with four specialized compost turners that cost \$400,000 each, Vigliotti said.

As suburban sprawl encroaches nearer to East End farmland, Vigliotti tries to stay mindful of the residential community, something Tom Jurgielewicz, owner of Moriches-based Jurgielewicz Duck Farm, appreciates. His company partners with Long Island Compost to handle its duck manure. "Nobody wants a compost site [nearby]," Jurgielewicz said. But Long Island Compost won't turn on the machine "if the wind is blowing the wrong way. They really care."

Today the company recycles more than 150,000 tons of leaves and grass clippings and 100,000 cubic yards of trees, shrubs and bushes annually. The onsite composting eliminates the need to transport the material, reducing truck traffic on local highways, Vigliotti said. Such composting also keeps nitrogen from duck manure out of the water system.

By reusing that local organic material here in Long Island's back yards, it's all part of what Vigliotti calls the "perfect recycle circle."



**Charles Vigliotti,
President and Chief
Executive Officer,
Long Island Compost.**

For more information, contact:

Charles Vigliotti
President and Chief Executive Officer
Long Island Compost
100 Urban Avenue
Westbury, New York 11590

(516) 334-6600
www.licompost.com